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AUTHOR Wagner, Mary Lou
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ABSTRACT

Interviews were conducted with 15 Black and 15 Puerto Rican women students from Brookdale Community College, New Jersey, and with 15 Black and 15 Puerto Rican women not attending college in order to determine: (1) if adult, minority women enrolled in college were more self-directed than those who had not sought further education: (2) the differences that existed between the students and non-students with regard to motivation, personal interests, and aspirations: and (3) the obstacles perceived by both groups as hindering their chances for further education. Characteristics such as age, marital status, number of children, financial responsibility, employment status, educational levels, reasons for seeking further education, and educational interests were determined during the interviews and the Rotter Scale of Internal Reinforcement was used to assess the women's internal/external locus of control. Selected findings reveal that the majority of all respondents were externally oriented, thus casting in doubt the hypothesis that those seeking further education operate from an internal locus of control. More significant differences were revealed between the two minority populations than between the college and non-college groups. The major obstacles to further education recognized by the Black and Puerto Rican college and non-college groups centered around finances and home responsibility. (JP)

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THE ADULT MINORITY WOMEN in the COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by Mary Lou Wagner

A Paper Presented at the Annual Conference
of the
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Introduction

In recent years, schooling beyond the high school level is being sought by adults as well as by young people. For the first time large numbers of mature individuals are using education to restructure their lives and increase their options (Turnbull, 1976, p. 14). The presence of blue collar workers, suburban housewives, and other non-traditional adults in college classrooms is no longer extraordinary. Society and its attitudes toward higher education have changed.

This paper will discuss the results of a study conducted among one of the numerous subgroups which are currently among the college-bound populations, the adult minority women.

Background of the Study

First, an examination of the growth of the adult populations on the college campuses. The percentage of adult students, those beyond the usual 18 to 20 year old range, has been the fastest growing segment in higher education in

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recent years, and by 1975 represented 48 percent of the total enrollment of 10 million. This is in contrast to 1970 when students beyond age 22 constituted only 39 percent of a total enrollment of 8 million (Maeroff, 1975, p. 2).

This phenomena is noteworthy not only because of the age of the students, but also because of the diversity of their social backgrounds. In colonial days the first colleges were intended to serve a particular class of people, and to extend the power and control of the elite (Rippa, 1975, p. 78). During the next century colleges came to be characterized by more diversity, but continued to represent only particular subcultures from which were drawn the financial support, trustees, president, and students. Later, institutions of higher learning became increasingly aware of social commitment. Knowledge came to be recognized as a tool for reforming and advancing society. By the 1960's, the American colleges and universities had acquired new functions and showed a greater concern for improving the quality of American life and the desire to do something about the inequalities of our culture.

Because of the development of these popular functions of education, colleges and universities are now expected to provide education for all those who seek it. Today "higher education is regarded as a right rather than a privilege" (Holmes & Scanlon, 1971, p. 55). Several important trends have emerged from this: Most of the influx of students is

accommodated by public institutions; higher education, whether public or private, is increasingly urban; and not only do students come from urban areas, but they are drawn from the previously under-represented minority groups (Holmes & Scanlon, 1971, p. 61).

There has also evolved a need for a different kind of college, the community college:

> The local community junior college, with little or no tuition charges and with a broadly diversified instructional program, compliments the work of the high school, the technological institute, the college, and the university. It attempts to provide appropriately for the education of all citizens who desire and can profit by further study. In this way, American communities have moved to create opportunity for citizens of all varieties of high ability, of all social and economic classes, to develop their talents for the service of society, and for their own self-interest (Thornton, 1972, p. 34).

The increase in enrollment of adult students in the two-year colleges reflects this educational development. In a survey conducted in 1972 by the National Center for Educational Statistics, it was found that while the adult enrollment in four-year colleges and universities decreased after 1970, the two-year colleges gained over a million students, a 65 percent increase (Kimmel, 1976, p. 681).

Of these, there is a noticeable number of minority students who are turning to the two-year colleges because of their economic availability, open admissions policies, and special student services. A 1970 study showed there were 11.5 percent minority students in 674 two-year colleges, with more recent studies indicating the enrollment to range from 20 to 30 percent of the total student population (Goodrich, Lezotte, and Welsh, 1972, p. 28-31). The largest increase of enrollment is in the older age groups, where in 1974 more blacks age 25-34 were enrolling in college than whites of the same age group (Boulding, 1976, p. 186).

The increased numbers of minority students on the community college campuses pose a major educational problem. Not enough is known by most community college personnel about these people, nor is there assurance that what is known is adequately interpreted and applied in the planning of programs, courses, and services (Gleazer, 1973, p. 36).

Many minorities have come to perceive the community colleges as institutions where they can explore a variety of occupational and academic opportunities, as well as receive guidance, counseling and personalized supportive instructional assistance. Significant numbers see the community college as being in a strategic position to assist them with their educational aspirations in a manner that is not possible in the more traditional four-year institutions (Godbold, 1976, p. 24).

The question arises, to what extent do the college

officials know these diverse minority populations? What is the background and characteristics that shape their interests, career goals, and values? Are their particular educational and vocational needs adequately understood? James Thornton (1976) says of them:

> In the academic world, it is as if they (blacks, Mexican-Americans, etc.) were visitors from a foreign nation. They need assurance that they are welcomed, that success is possible, that they are accepted as persons of value in their own right.....The community college must recruit those who have never seen themselves as 'college material', and they must develop unconventional methods to prepare their recruits psychologically and academically for the struggle to develop their talents (p. 36).

Included among these students is a subgroup which has received little or no attention, the older minority women. More and more of them are seeking a college education at a time in their lives when they are already pre-occupied with their homes and families. In the past, most adult college women were identified as "typical middle-class housewives who have had two years of a traditional liberal arts education before they dropped out to marry or raise a family" (Roach, 1976, p. 86). Much of the research and data is directed towards women fitting this description (Roach;

Brandenburg; Bucky, Freeark, and O'Barr; Taines, and Barry). College officials need to know if the adult minority women fit this description as well. To date this is a student population about which very little is known.

Focus of the Study

The purpose of this study was to learn more about the older minority women on the community college campus.

In the past, minority women, for cultural and economic reasons, frequently have been prevented from seeking personal fulfillment. Their role has been much more focused on their responsibilities to their families, which most often has limited their activities to the family setting or work. Why, then, are some of them now found among the growing numbers of older students enrolling in the community colleges? How do they differ from women in their groups who are still more home-oriented?

First, this study focused on the motivations, aspirations, and personal interests of these women, as compared to women in their groups who have not sought out college-level learning. Secondly, an attempt was made to determine if the adult minority women in the community college were more self-directed than those who have not sought further education. To measure this, Julian Rotter's Scale of Internal Reinforcement (Rotter, 1966) which identifies internal-external locus of control, was employed. Third, the study investigated the extent to which these women per-

ceived of obstacles in their efforts to seek further schooling.

The sample for the study was obtained at Brookdale Community College, a suburban public two-year college in central New Jersey where a significant number of minority women are enrolled as students. A random sampling of women from the two largest minority groups on campus were selected to participate, the blacks and Puerto Ricans. The same number of non-college women were also included in the sample.

Three hypotheses stated in the null form were included in the study:

1. There will be no differences in the mean scores on Rotter's Scale of Internal Reinforcement between the black and Puerto Rican College populations and their non-college counterparts.

2. There will be no differences between the black and Puerto Rican college and non-college populations in regard to the following variables:

   a. children
   b. employment
   c. financial responsibility
   d. satisfaction with housewife role
   e. vocational aspirations and expectations
   f. influences on decision-making
   g. important influences 5 years from now

3. There will be no differences between the way in which the black and Puerto Rican college and non-college populations perceive obstacles to further schooling.

The final sample consisted of sixty women, fifteen blacks and fifteen Puerto Rican college students; and

thirty women, fifteen each from the same minority populations, who had never enrolled in college or earned college credits. The college women were randomly selected from the Registrar's list of the Spring semester 1979. They were women who had indicated their Ethnic Origin on their college application, as permitted by the voluntary Civil Rights Racial Category Code. The names of the non-college subjects were obtained from a variety of sources: 1. suggestions from the college subjects; 2. day care centers; 3. community resource centers; 4. social service agencies; 5. adult learning centers; etc.

The data was collected by means of two interview schedules, one for the college and one for the non-college subjects, prepared and administered by this investigator. The information obtained provided the data for a multivariate analysis of the significant factors suggested in the three hypotheses. Rotter's Scale of Internal Reinforcement was also administered to each of the subjects at the time of the interviews.

Description of Subjects

The average age of the subjects was 35.7 years. They were equally divided between married and single status. The average number of children living at home was 1.9, with the number ranging from none to over 5. The Puerto Rican women had more children then the blacks. With the exception of the black college women, the majority of

subjects had total financial responsibility for their families. The majority of the black non-college women, as well as the majority of all Puerto Rican subjects, received public assistance. Many of them were employed, at least in part time jobs. With the exception of the black college women, the majority of subjects had no mates presently living in the household.

Educational levels varied. The black college subjects had earned the most college credits, with an average of 31.1 credits. For the non-college women, fewer Puerto Ricans than blacks had graduated from high school, with the black women having attained more years of schooling even among those who had less than twelve years of school.

The reasons given by the college women for seeking further education were, first, for job-related reasons - to prepare for a vocation or increase job skills; and secondly, for the personal reasons of self-improvement and self-satisfaction. The black women were more interested in improving job skills, but the Puerto Rican women needed to obtain the job skills for the first time.

The majority of non-college subjects indicated an interest in a variety of educational programs, including: General Equivalency Diploma, vocational training, community college, and a 4 year college. Reasons given for interest in more education included: to learn a vocation, for self-improvement, and to help their children.

Results of the Study

Several statistical analyses were made of the responses to the questions asked on the interview schedules, including Fisher's Exact Test of Probability and Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation. An interpretation and summary will be given here for the three major areas which were under investigation as stated in the three hypotheses: The scores on Rotter's Scale of Internal Reinforcements; responses to the personal variables; and the perceived obstacles to further schooling.

Rotter's Scores

When comparing the mean scores on Rotter's Scale, there was evidence of some variation in the responses of the subjects. There were significant differences between the two black groups, and the college and non-college groups. All Puerto Rican women had similar responses. The scores for the Puerto Rican subjects were slightly higher and more externally-oriented than were the scores of the blacks. However, when comparing the college and non-college groups, the mean scores showed that the college subjects tended to be more externally, rather than internally, oriented.

This result is in conflict with Rotter's theory, which states that those individuals who take steps to improve their environmental conditions, value skill or achievement reinforcements, and make efforts to improve their circumstances through education are more internally-oriented

(Rotter, 1966, p. 25). This would imply that the subjects in this study who made the effort to enroll in college should be more internally-oriented, rather than externally-oriented, than those who have made no effort to seek out further schooling. Based upon the results of this research, it appears that further investigation in this area would be highly recommended, particularly as it applies to minority groups.

Personal Variables

In order to ascertain the personal differences between the women, the subjects were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. Number of children - none, 1-2, 3-5, over 5
2. Employment - employed, mate employed
3. Financial responsibility - total, shared
4. Influences of others on decision-making - mate, children, other family members, friends, authority figures, Women's Lib ideas
5. Satisfaction with housewife role - satisfied, unsatisfied
6. Vocational aspirations and expectations - what you would like to do, what you expect to do
7. Important influences 5 years from now - job, college education, mate, children, other family members, friends, personal ambition

In a comparison of the differences in the responses to these personal-related variables (using Fisher's Exact Test of Probability), there were a number of significant relationships. In most instances, differences appeared between the two minority groups, as well as between the

combined college and non-college populations. The two black groups showed the greater differences, with the black college women being more self-directed than the non-college women in the areas of employment and financial responsibility. A few more of the Puerto Rican college women identified positively with Women's Lib, but the majority in all groups responded negatively to the influence of women's liberation ideas. Based upon the results of this study, it can be concluded that the Women's Movement is not supported by the adult women of these two minorities.

Although there were no significant differences between the black and Puerto Rican women for vocational expectations and aspirations, the combined college group exhibited more definite vocational goals than did the non-college groups, with the black college women contributing most significantly to the difference. The one area in which there was almost total disagreement between the college and non-college groups was the importance of a college education five years from now. The college subjects considered a college education to be much more important than did the non-college women, which would indicate that unless circumstances change, most of the non-college women do not anticipate seeking higher education. (Although, when asked about more education during the interviews, the majority of all subjects showed an interest.)

There were also significant areas in which the groups

were in agreement. These included: number of children living at home; satisfaction with the housewife role; positive influences of mate, children, friends; and the important influences five years from now of job, mate, children, other family members, friends, and own personal ambition. In general, the subjects from both minority groups were similar in a variety of important ways.

Obstacles to Further Schooling

The subjects were asked to indicate if the following factors were, or could be, obstacles in their efforts to seek further schooling:

Classes conflict with job
Classes conflict with home responsibilities
Poor public transportation
Tuition costs too high
Books, supplies and fees too expensive
Cost of travel too great
Child care too expensive
Care of disabled adult at home too expensive
Too far from home
Too far from job
Too much time spent getting to college
Courses not related to job
Lack of interest in college education
Marital status changed plans
Illness - personal or family
Personal adjustment to college
Fear of failure
Family or mate objected
Home responsibilities too great

There were differences for eight of the nineteen obstacles (42% of the total), which were not enough to be of statistical significance. However, an interpretation of the data may provide further insight into the problem of the study. The differences that were evident appeared between the college and non-college groups, rather than between the two minority populations. Those obstacles for

which there were significant differences were: tuition costs too high; books, supplies, fees, etc. too expensive; cost of transportation too great; child care too expensive; care of disabled adult at home; lack of interest in education; family or mate objected; and home responsibilities too great. For all but one of these, it was the non-college women who considered them to be problems. The college women noted only one obstacle more frequently than did the non-college, the objection of family or mate.

Upon further investigation, it also appeared that the obstacles noted by the non-college subjects most often related to two key factors, finances and home responsibilities. (During the interviews they were the major concerns of most of the women.) As was stated earlier, the majority of the non-college women indicated an interest in further schooling, but in response to this part of the study, they noted a number of important hurdles that would make it difficult for them to seek further education. Since there were many similarities between the college and non-college subjects, it would be of value to ascertain how the college women were able to overcome these obstacles, or not perceive of them as problems. Their experiences may be helpful for the non-college subjects, who would like more education but believe that a number of important obstacles stand in their way.

Conclusions

Based upon the data collected and the interpretations

as presented for each of the three hypotheses, the following conclusions were drawn from the results of the study:

1. The anticipated pattern of relationships between the internal-external locus of control and college attendance was not found. Most of the subjects were more externally-oriented.

2. In this study there were more differences of significance between the two minority populations than there were between the college and non-college subjects.

3. Both the Black and Puerto Rican college and non-college subjects believed a number of important obstacles hindered their efforts to seek further education.

4. The major obstacles to further education centered around finances and home responsibilities, with more of the non-college subjects recognizing them to be problems.

In closing, as was stated at the outset, the public two-year colleges must be better prepared to serve their communities. More information needs to be obtained about the diverse populations who are now turning to the institutions of higher learning. The adult minority women are included among these. It is hoped that the conclusions drawn here about the black and Puerto Rican women can add further insights into the concerns and needs of women of these populations now found in growing numbers on the college campuses. Of particular interest in these results, is the fact that there are many non-college women sharing the same characteristics as the college women. Perhaps, with better guidance and increased opportunities, many of them, too, will be able to benefit from a community college education.

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